

THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

Form follows function when it comes to planning a kitchen renovation



SASCHA LAFLEUR
LIVING
IN STYLE

Everyone loves a good kitchen renovation. It's typically where you'll see the highest financial return on your investment, so it's often the first place home-owners decide to spend their money.

The kitchen is the most-used room in the home, it's the most expensive to renovate, and when the reno is complete and life returns to normal, it's also the most scrutinized.

FUNCTION FIRST. Before you dig into your renovation, review your needs of the space. Do your kids require a homework area? Are you a baker? Do you entertain often in your kitchen? Understanding the functional aspects of your kitchen needed will help to define the details of the design.

Set your expectations and be realistic about timelines. Start your

design and renovation plans at least two to four months before demolition, depending on the size of the space. This gives everyone time to create the best design, hire the right trades and ensure no products are back ordered. If you plan your reno right, it can be completed by the time the snow melts.

Remember, planning ahead is key. As one of the more popular rooms that I take on in my professional capacity, here are three key considerations to discuss with your kitchen designer at the drawing board.

KITCHEN ISLAND. The island is the beating heart of many modern-day kitchens as the main cooking, casual dining and conversation hot-spot. Are you planning to incorporate an island in your kitchen? Do you have enough room for this hefty fixture?

In order to be functional, your island needs to measure a minimum of three by four feet — especially if you plan to integrate appliances or seating. Be sure to factor in a four-



Planning is all-important. Be sure to factor in enough space around an island to accommodate cooking and foot traffic.

foot wide path around the island to accommodate cooking and foot traffic. If your kitchen can handle it, then an island is certainly a well-used and high-ROI upgrade to have in your home!

ISLAND UPGRADES. Due to its central location and high-functioning role, the island is a wise place to invest in some built-in storage areas

— and trust me, when it comes to the kitchen, storage is always in demand. Go custom with an organization system that's tailored to your lifestyle and preferences. For example, if you will be using your island as a cooking area, consider adding some dedicated storage for cooking essentials, small appliances, spices and utensils.

Same goes for wine lovers, pottery collectors, preserve-makers, dessert-bakers, you get the picture. Your storage can come in the form of closed cabinets and drawers, open shelving, or a combination of these. Keep in mind that your kitchen island's storage capacity will be limited if you're working around an integrated cook-top, sink or slide-out waste bins.

COUNTERTOPS. As you work your way through your kitchen project on paper, countertops are likely already near the top of your to-do list. In fact, you probably already have a good idea of where you're headed in terms of material and colour, but have you considered function? Materials such as granite, quartz and marble come in a range of price points and all offer their own set of advantages and different degrees of maintenance required to extend your countertops' life and lustre.

Countertops are custom cut and have to be ordered in advance. Know what you need to in terms of product and layout is key to keeping your project on track. Things like sink, appliances and backsplash can't be installed until the countertop is in place.

The kitchen has always been the most important room in the home, and storage space (or lack thereof) can put all your renovation planning, budget, hopes and dreams to waste. Take the time to create a design plan that ensures your kitchen is everything it could be and should be, and more.

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Countertops are usually 'top-of-the-list' and come in a variety of materials and price points.



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A GREAT KITCHEN STARTS WITH A DESIGN

A well-designed kitchen is a beautiful thing. The house functions better, your day runs smoother, meals take less time to prepare and cook, and since the kitchen is the biggest selling feature of the home, enhances the property value.

On the other hand, a kitchen that doesn't work for one reason or another becomes the bane of your existence, from wasted space, money and overall functionality. If you're in the thick of a home renovation or are considering doing one in the future, here are some key things to keep in mind when it comes to your kitchen design.

Efficient traffic. I'm all in for getting your daily steps in for health reasons, but have you considered how many of those are wasted in your kitchen? You'd be surprised at the number of steps (and collective minutes) that are lost to poorly designed paths of traffic. When planning your kitchen renovation, keep in mind your work triangle — the refrigerator, sink and stove.

If you're creating a kitchen from scratch, you have the benefit of planning their placement to ensure it makes sense from an efficiency perspective. As a general rule, each side of your triangle should be between four and nine feet, eliminating the daily food-prep marathon while allowing enough room to manoeuvre comfortably. By the same logic, also consider how and where you will organize your items. For example, coffee cups should be stored near the coffee maker, dishes and flatware near the dishwasher.

Room to breathe. Kitchens are by far the busiest room in our homes, and at no time is this more obvious than when a passerby bumps into you as



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you try to slice and dice, whip and flip. What I'm getting at here is the need for space around you. Ensure your traffic aisles are wide enough to accommodate the level of traffic. Consider how many people live in the home and how many typically use the kitchen at one time. As diners and as chefs. I recommend 42-inch wide aisles for one working chef, or 48 inches for two.

Determine the island's function. Your kitchen island is a focal point for many reasons. It's huge. It's also typically at the centre of the space. From a functional perspective, it's also the star of the show. Most kitchen islands serve many different functions — food prep, dining, storage, and others — it's important to identify a primary purpose. Not only will this inform the island specs, but it will change other aspects of your kitchen as well, presuming that the island will shoulder some of the load, whether it's eating breakfast, chopping veggies or storing pots and pans.

TIP: If you plan to share meals together at the breakfast bar or kitchen island, allow 24 inches per person, to accommodate each place setting and elbows.

At the risk of sounding totally biased (which as a designer, I obviously am!) my final tip is to engage the services of a professional like me, when designing your kitchen. A kitchen is already the most expensive room to renovate, not to mention seriously inconvenient when it's out of commission during the reno. You'll be glad you did when your kitchen is not only stylish, but functions well for the entire family.

Be sure to check out my next column for more tips on planning a successful kitchen renovation.

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STAYING NEUTRAL BY DESIGN

There's a lot to be said
for the longevity
and power of neutrals



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As we kick off another new year, all eyes are focussed on the latest trends, the freshest styles and the "it" colour of the year.

Out with the old, in with the new, right? Not quite. There's a lot to be said for interiors with longevity and the power of neutrals.

First of all, neutrals don't age. Consider this the fountain of youth for your home. Neutral finishes are timeless, which means you won't have to endure the inconvenience or cost of replacing them in an effort to keep up with the trends. This also means your existing finishes won't end up in a landfill anytime soon. Everyone wins.

Despite the obvious benefits, people sometimes shy away from neutrals for fear of being bland and boring.

I'm here to tell you that this couldn't be further from the truth! Here are some tips for where and when to use neutrals, and how to do it with style!

Generally speaking, choose neutrals for big-ticket or large-scale items such as countertops, flooring, cabinets, backsplash and walls. Traditional neutrals include cream and beige tones, but white, dove grey, taupe, brown and black can all do the trick.

When choosing your colours for finishes and paint, they don't necessarily all have to be the same colour but be mindful of their temperature. Place your swatches and samples side by side and look for yellowish (warm) or bluish (cool) undertones. If the temperatures don't match, your choices will appear tinted instead of neutral as intended.

Texture goes a long way when working with neutral finishes. Dress up the beige (or whatever neutral colour) by incorporating a variety of finishes and textural elements. Create contrast with high-gloss and matte, rough and smooth surfaces.

Layer elements of wood, stone, glass, metal and mirror, which are all thought to be colour-neutral but rich in visual interest. When it comes to textiles such as upholstery, window coverings and rugs, solids juxtaposed against pattern creates a similar layered look.

TIP: Mixing metals is very trendy, easy to do and it won't break your budget. In addition, this is another easy way to add interest to a neutral base. Kitchen appliances, hardware, fixtures, lighting, furniture and accessories are the usual suspects for touches of gold, silver, bronze, stainless steel or all of the above! When it comes to finish (for example, polished, matte or brushed), feel free to mix those up as well. Just be sure the various metals and finishes are referenced in other areas in the home, for consistency and connection.

Last but not least, lighting brings vibrancy and visual interest to any space, but especially to a neutral interior. An unlit room can easily fall flat, losing important detail and dimension. Layer ambient, task and accent lighting, and when in doubt, put everything on dimmer switches that allow you to control the intensity and mood. Use your lighting to highlight focal points in the home, from architectural elements and furniture vignettes to artwork. It can even be used to create points of interest in a space where they may otherwise be lacking!

Personally, I love decorating with neutrals. They are calming, soothing



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and effortless, at least in their appearance. In addition, a neutral palette can actually make a space feel bigger and brighter, which are two qualities that most of us wish we had more of in our homes. I'd even go so far as to say neutrals are easy to work with, if you know how. With these simple tricks, your neutral rooms will be anything but boring.

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